

## Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

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INFO CINCPAC HONOLULU

COMUSMACTHAI BANGKOK

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 2361

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O.11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, TH

SUBJECT: ELECTION DEVELOPMENTS

REF: BANGKOK 2092

SUMMARY. MAJOR PARTIES RELEASE 50-80 PERCENT OF NAMES OF THEIR PARTIES' CANDIDATES IN APRIL 4 ELECTIONS. ONLY FEW MINOR PARTIES HAVE ANNOUNCED EVEN PARTIAL LISTS OF CANDIDATES. EMBASSY BELIEVES COMMUNIST SCARE AND TAMBON DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM WILL BE "ISSUES" IN ELECTIONS. END SUMMARY.

1. WITH THE DATE TO BEGIN REGISTRATION OF CANDIDATES (FEBRUARY 9) DRAWING NEAR, MOST OF THE MAJOR THAI POLITICAL PARTIES HAVE RELEASED PARTIAL LISTS OF CANDIDATES. PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT PRAMOT'S SOCIAL ACTION PARTY (SAP) HEADS THE LIST WITH APPROXIMATELY 80 PERCENT OF THE NAMES OF ITS CANDIDATES RELEASED. SAP HAD ORIGINALLY ANNOUNCED THAT A COMPLETE LIST WOULD BE RELEASED ON JANUARY 29, BUT THERE HAVE BEEN SERIOUS DIFFERENCES WITHIN THE PARTY OVER CERTAIN CANDIDATES AND THE NAMES HAVE TRICKLED OUT SLOWLY (SEE REFTTEL), WITH THE CANDIDATES FROM  
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THREE PROVINCES AND BANGKOK YET TO BE ANNOUNCED. THE

SOCIAL JUSTICE, NEW FORCE, THAI NATION, AND DEMOCRAT PARTIES HAVE ALL RELEASED THE NAMES OF AT LEAST 50 PERCENT OF THEIR CANDIDATES. ONLY THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF THAILAND AND THE SOCIALIST UNITED FRONT ARE KEEPING RELATIVELY QUIET ABOUT THEIR CANDIDATES.

2. ONLY A FEW OF THE MINOR PARTIES HAVE ANNOUNCED EVEN PARTIAL LISTS OF CANDIDATES, AND SOME MAY FIELD NO CANDIDATES AT ALL. THE SOCIAL NATIONALIST PARTY, PART OF THE GOVERNMENT COALITION AND THE SIXTH LARGEST PARTY IN THE LAST PARLIAMENT, HAS BEEN REDUCED TO THE STATUS OF A MINOR PARTY BY DEFECTIONS, AND HAS YET TO ANNOUNCE ANY CANDIDATES AT ALL.

3. IT IS EXPECTED THAT VIRTUALLY ALL CANDIDATES OF THE MAJOR PARTIES WILL BE KNOWN BEFORE REGISTRATION ACTUALLY BEGINS ON FEBRUARY 9. AT THAT TIME, EMBASSY WILL HAVE A CLEARER IDEA OF WHAT PARTIES ARE CONTESTING THE ELECTION, AND WILL BE BETTER ABLE TO ASSESS THE RELATIVE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF EACH.

4. SENATOR BUNCHANA ATHAKON, THAI AMBASSADOR TO THE US 1968-69, TOOK OVER THE LEADERSHIP OF THE PEOPLE'S FORCE PARTY (PFP) ON FEBRUARY 3. THE PFP WAS ONE OF THE "UNDER-10" PARTIES IN THE LAST ELECTION AND HAD TWO MP'S IN PARLIAMENT. UNTIL BECOMING LEADER OF THE PFP, BUNCHANA HAD BEEN A MEMBER OF THE CONSERVATIVE FACTION OF THE DEMOCRAT PARTY. HE HAD WANTED TO RUN IN BANGKOK AS A DEMOCRAT BUT THE DEMOCRATS REFUSED, PERHAPS BECAUSE OF HIS AGE (65), AND VERY CONSERVATIVE PHILOSOPHY.

5. IT IS STILL TOO EARLY IN THE ELECTION PROCESS TO DISCERN CLEARLY WHAT THE MAJOR ISSUES IN THE CAMPAIGN WILL BE. HOWEVER, IT IS EVIDENT FROM DISCUSSIONS EMBOFFS HAVE HAD WITH POLITICIANS OF VARIOUS PARTIES THAT THE CONSERVATIVE PARTIES IN THE GOVERNMENT COALITION WILL USE THE FEAR OF COMMUNIST TAKEOVER IN THEIR ELECTION CAMPAIGNING, ESPECIALLY IN THE NORTHEAST. THEY WILL USE THE EXAMPLE OF THE LAO AND TO A LESSER EXTENT THE CAMBODIAN REFUGEES WHO HAVE STREAMED INTO THAILAND AFTER THE

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COMMUNIST TAKEOVER IN THOSE COUNTRIES TO WARN THE PEOPLE ABOUT VOTING FOR THE TWO SOCIALIST, NEW FORCE AND DEMOCRAT PARTIES, AND WILL ATTEMPT TO TART THEM AS "COMMUNIST" PARTIES. THE DEMOCRATS BELIEVE THEMSELVES SOMEWHAT VULNERABLE TO THIS CHARGE BECAUSE OF THEIR TEMPORARY ALLIANCE WITH THE SOCIALIST PARTIES IN TRYING TO BRING DOWN THE KHUKRIT GOVERNMENT IN JANUARY 1976. DEMOCRATS HAVE TOLD EMBOFFS THAT THEY ARE PLANNING TO

DEFEND THEMSELVES BY EXPLAINING WHY THEY MADE SUCH AN ALLIANCE.

6. THE SOCIAL ACTION PARTY (SAP) WILL TRY TO CAPITALIZE ON THE "SUCCESS" OF THE TAMBON DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM TO GAIN VOTES FOR SAP CANDIDATES. COMMENT: ANY DISCUSSION OF "ISSUES" AND THEIR IMPACT ON ELECTION RESULTS MUST BE KEPT IN PERSPECTIVE BECAUSE PERSONALITIES (I.E., WHO THE CANDIDATE IS) AND NOT PARTIES OR ISSUES ARE OF PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE TO THE VOTERS IN THAI POLITICS. WHITEHOUSE

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